

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 2003

TWO DOLLARS





## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr.

As hundreds of thousands of hunters head out for this year's hunting season, whether it be in pursuit of that big buck or calling in a flock of geese into a spread of decoys, the message from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries continues to be one of safety while afield.

Right now is the peak demand for Hunter Education courses and we encourage everyone, the seasoned and the green, to take this valuable class. The program offers everything from wilderness survival to wildlife identification. It exposes participants to black powder and archery, as well as the safe handling of firearms. No matter what your level of experience, this class will deepen your appreciation for the outdoor experience and make you a better sportsman. So, if you know of folks with an interest in the outdoors, I encourage you to get them to take a class.

Even though hunting continues to be one of the safest outdoor activities, injuries can occur. The few incidents that we do have attract a lot of news coverage. This past spring we had a highly visible incident that resulted in the death of a hunter. David Stack of Nanjemoy, Maryland was killed while turkey hunting in Rockbridge County on Saturday, April 12, 2003. He was hunting in the area between South Buffalo Road and Bluegrass Trail near an area known as Saville Hill when he was shot in the back. The shooter did not come forward and the case is still unsolved.

Game wardens continue to investigate this case and aggressively seek the individual(s) responsible for the death of David Stack. This case has caught national attention

and the television program "America's Most Wanted" plans to feature the story in their fall line-up this year.

With the support of the Virginia State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and other concerned individuals, a reward fund has been established with the hope that it will shake loose a piece of evidence that will unravel this mystery. I ask that anyone with information that may lead to the identity of the shooter to call our Wildlife Crime Line at 1-800-237-5712 or email us at [wildcrime@dgif.state.va.us](mailto:wildcrime@dgif.state.va.us). In fact, if you are aware of any wildlife crime, I urge you to report it. Your identity will remain confidential.

I would ask that everyone remember that the use of blaze orange, the proper handling of firearms, and identifying your target and beyond will help prevent future incidents. We hope that the many experiences you have this hunting season will be enjoyable, and most importantly, safe.



A television production crew interviews VDGIF game wardens for a segment of "America's Most Wanted."

### Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

## HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES

Subsidized this publication

Secretary of Natural Resources  
W. Tayloe Murphy, Jr.

Department of Game and  
Inland Fisheries  
William L. Woodfin, Jr., Director

### Members of the Board

Daniel A. Hoffler, Eastville, Chairman  
Cecil T. Campbell, Warrenton  
Richard L. Corrigan, Arlington  
Sherry Smith Crumley, Buchanan  
Chuck Cunningham, Fairfax  
C. Marshall Davison, Hague  
Dan R. McCoy, Big Stone Gap  
Will McNeely, Charlottesville  
John W. Montgomery, Jr., Sandston  
Richard E. Railey, Courtland  
Jack T. Shoosmith, Chester

### Magazine Staff

Lee Walker, Editor  
Mel White, Ron Messina, Julia Dixon,  
Contributing Editors  
Emily Pels, Art Director  
Carol Kushlak, Production Assistant  
Staff Contributors: Carol Heiser, John  
Odenkirk

Color separations and printing by Nittany  
Valley Offset, State College, PA.

*Virginia Wildlife* (ISSN 0042 6792) is published monthly by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send all subscription orders and address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P.O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Address all other communications concerning this publication to *Virginia Wildlife*, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rate is \$12.95 for one year, \$23.95 for two years; \$2.00 per each back issue, subject to availability. Out-of-country rates are \$24.95 for one year and must be paid in U.S. funds. To subscribe, call toll-free (800) 710-9369. Postmaster: Please send all address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P.O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Postage for periodicals paid at Richmond, Virginia and additional entry offices.

Copyright 2003 by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. All rights reserved.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries shall afford to all persons an equal access to Department programs and facilities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, or age. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, please write to: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, ATTN: Compliance Officer, 4010 West Broad Street, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104.

"This publication is intended for general informational purposes only and every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy. The information contained herein does not serve as a legal representation of fish and wildlife laws or regulations. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries does not assume responsibility for any change in dates, regulations, or information that may occur after publication."

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



page 12



page 21



About the cover: The great egret (*Ardea alba*) is the largest of the all-white herons, and it can be found along Virginia's freshwater and coastal saltwater marshes. Unlike other heron species, the great egret does not feed at night and prefers to spend the daylight hours slowly foraging for food in shallow water. Photo ©John R. Ford.



page 4

## Features

### 4 Oh Deer! by Mel White

Learning to live with Virginia's suburban deer.

### 8 White-out by Carol A. Heiser

This month *Wild in the Woods* takes an eye-opening look at albinism in wildlife.

### 12 Primetime Smallmouth by Bruce Ingram

Heat up your autumn angling action with a blazing bronzeback fishing trip.

### 17 Virginia Wildlife Outdoor Catalog

Hunting for that unique holiday season gift? Look no further.

### 21 Hunting Deer 101 by Denny Quaiff

Brushing up on your deer hunting knowledge just might put you at the head of the class.

### 26 Eyes of an Artist by Bob Gooch

After 30 years of hard work and persistence, a Virginia wildlife artist captures the most prestigious waterfowl art competition in the world.



page 8

## October Journal

30 Journal

34 Recipes

32 Scuba

Ducks

33 On The Water

Naturally Wild

Personal Locator Beacon

Common Moorhen

## Virginia Wildlife OUTDOOR CATALOG



page 17

## VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

### Magazine Subscriptions

subscription calls only

1-800-710-9369

12 issues for \$12.95!

24 issues for \$23.95

*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*



©Bill Lea

# OH Deer!

## *Can we live in harmony with suburban deer?*

by Mel White

I walk out on the porch on a late summer evening, and they look up at me, their big brown eyes offering little more than a glance but nothing approaching a stare. Then, without giving me even a flip of their white tails, they go peacefully back to their dining experience. I'm so "in tune" with nature. I've done everything just the way it was suggested in *Virginia Wildlife*; the half acre or so behind the house is a meadow of wildflowers and native warm season grasses waving like a proper prairie in the warm wind.

The deer, however, are eating what's left of my vegetable garden.



©Sarah White

And it wasn't what I failed to harvest, but it was just what they hadn't already eaten. This is a rapidly growing dilemma in much of Virginia as the deer population remains high and the human migration continues further and further into deer territory. For deer your ornamentals and vegetables can, in many cases, become more than snack food.

Deer, along with the weather, can be devastating to the backyard farmer. Last year was a prime example. I planted nine 30-foot rows of vegetables on a late April weekend, mostly nursery stock, and the deer promptly ate virtually all of it. Armed with encircling cages for the tomato plants and chicken wire covers for the row crops, I planted again. On the 15th of May a hard freeze killed everything. Planted again the



Big bucks aren't just in the woods anymore, suburban yards and gardens have become fertile feeding grounds. Cages work well in the garden, but are unattractive when placed around flowers and shrubbery.

next weekend, a late start, but still OK. At this time the deer had plenty to eat in the woods and temporarily left my veggies, and my wife's roses, alone. Things were looking up until the rain stopped coming down. Drought is hard on everyone, so when the deer found the garden again, I didn't mind sharing with them. But, they could have left me one, just one green bean.

With more and more deer per square mile in many areas the suburban gardener has a worthy adversary for this annual spring joust.

So, how do I try to live with deer? Planting flowers and vegetables that deer don't like to eat. Of course, that often means not successfully planting things that I like. Some plants seem to be more or less immune. Perhaps nobody likes them.

Deer, generally, leave tomato plants alone once the vines begin to mature and they are not too keen on ripe tomatoes themselves. However, when "my" deer do go after ripe tomatoes they tend to take one bite

and then go on to another tomato. I guess their mothers never made them clean their plates.

Okra plants are pretty safe and their flowers are big and showy so it makes a nice addition to the garden. I've even heard that some people eat okra.

They usually just don't even look at potatoes. This is probably a union rule that states the potato plant is the exclusive property of the Colorado potato beetle.

Older pumpkin vines fair pretty well, but baseball size pumpkins make fine snacks. This fall I had an over abundance of pie pumpkins so I left them in the field and cut some in half just to see if the deer would eat them. The deer left them completely alone, but the decaying

pumpkins did attract a turkey vulture one cold fall morning.

The Ichiban variety of eggplant seems completely safe from wandering deer. As do cucumbers, except when the plants are very young. This list could go on and there are listings available on the Internet of deer resistant plants. These lists, I'm sure, are compiled in good faith. Deer, however, can't read and are extremely adaptable in their food habits, take my rhubarb for example. The leaves contain oxalic acid and are considered poisonous. One night at the height of last summer's drought our little deer herd ate a 10-foot row of mature rhubarb plants right down to the roots. The next evening as they browsed through the yard, they all seemed in good health.

Another proposed solution is repellents, something that the deer find distasteful, bad smelling or scary. I tried bad smelling fertilizer. There is at least one brand of fertilizer that is made from sewage sludge and is reputed to keep deer away. It worked for a few days and then its odor began to fade, thankfully. And the deer walked right over it to the garden. I applied more but the second application had no effect at all. I had to assume that the deer simply got used to it. However, the grass



paths between my garden rows turned a lush green.

There are a plethora of liquid sprays and powders that purport to repel deer. Most of these concoctions either smell or taste bad to deer. At least, that's the theory. Many are toxic enough to be labeled for use on ornamentals only. Any that I've found that you can safely use on vegetables have one major drawback—they can be washed off. On average in Virginia, we have just over a hundred days of rain a year. So, you put it on, it rains, and you put more on and it rains again and on you go until you've sloshed your veggies with gallons and gallons of noxious goop. Of course, the deer won't eat them. I wouldn't either.

Then there's scaring them. This

runs away. But, for that deer at least, it never works again. Why? Let's look at it from the deer's point of view. "I'm hungry and those beans looked good. I ate some and got squirted with water and ran away. Last night I ate some more, got squirted and ran away again. Tonight I'm going to eat all the beans I want and I don't care if I get totally soaked by your silly hose."

A physical barrier, it's the only thing that a deer really understands. I sincerely believe that a fence, a cage or something similar is the only thing that will consistently keep deer out of your garden. Two years ago I planted sixteen fruit trees. Each got a 5-foot high, 36-inch diameter wire cage that was securely staked to the ground. I never observed a deer

a 7-foot one most of the time. An eight-foot fence made of woven wire is very effective if you want to keep deer out of an area. It also has two major drawbacks. First, it's expensive, \$4.00 to \$6.00 per foot installed. Second, you gain the "concentration camp" look. Almost anyway you install it, it's just plain ugly! You can do the same thing with "plastic" which is less visible, especially in wooded areas. Cost of just the materials necessary to fence in two acres with a couple of gates to let you in and out is very close to \$5,000. I also worry about birds and animals becoming entangled in the plastic netting. A buck with his antlers entangled in your plastic fence is a big problem for everyone. Another one that can work and is not unattractive is a set of two



category is getting more high tech on a daily basis. Usually a sensor, be it motion, heat or whatever, tells the device that an "object" is in a certain position and triggers a reaction. Some attempt to hit the target with a jet of water. Others set off a horn, bell, siren or some other noise-making gadget, you know, like a small explosion. The deer, of course, make a run for it. The reality is that the next night the deer is hungry again and those snaps look so good hanging on the bean stalk that it just has to have some. Sensor reacts; deer gets squirted with water and

even investigating the tender young trees, the cages worked perfectly. A shorter version worked well with tomatoes. The cages protected the young plants, supported the mature ones and allowed for only marginal loss of produce.

Fences work...well, some do. Few animals in Virginia can jump as gracefully as a white-tailed deer. They appear to effortlessly launch themselves, seemingly flying through the air...right over your fence. That's right, over. Most deer can clear a 6-foot fence with ease and

Deer can't resist roses. Left: This climbing rose, over 8-feet tall, was reduced to stems and thorns in one night. Above: This 3-foot wire fence is very easy for a deer to jump over.

relatively low fences 4 feet apart. Deer don't like to jump over this gap even though they could. I mentioned this fence to my sister-in-law who used to live in the far boondocks of Missouri. "Oh sure, she said. We had one and it worked fine and we ran chickens between the fences." A deer proof fence and a chicken yard at the same time, not a bad idea. One other design that

is reputed to be effective sets the fence posts at an angle. The deer seem to be confused about the distance they have to jump to clear this one. Electric fences, forget it unless you're in the cattle business.

My favorite idea, probably because I haven't tried it yet, is invisible fencing and a dependable dog. The wire, usually buried, sends a signal to a device on the dog's collar. Zap, he doesn't like that and therefore avoids crossing the line. The deer, on the other hand, are not affected in any way. You would need a sturdy outdoor type dog, like a Scottish deerhound or a Rhodesian ridgeback, whose breeding makes him a natural watchdog, that will instinctively chase the deer off the property. The dog is fed in the morning and

medium sized, heavily furred dog that originated in Holland and was bred to be a watchdog on ships and barges. Keeshonds today are still ever alert watchdogs with a loud bark and fearless, though phony, demeanor. But Keeshonds are much more attuned to intrusions by people than other animals. Consequently, it took a couple of tries to show Guinness (yes, she names all her dogs after brands of beer) that these big things in the yard needed to be run off. He finally got it and took off after the herd barking furiously. The deer were springing off into the woods when one young doe turned around, put her head down, and began chasing Guinness. He ran for 50 yards or so and turned on the deer again and disappeared around the

\$25.00 you can take at least three deer during the season. First you need to make sure you can safely and legally hunt on your property. Consider the distance to your nearest neighbor, can you make a safe shot? If you live in a subdivision, check to see that it doesn't have restrictions concerning hunting. Surprising even some subdivisions whose lots span several acres each have covenants that restrict hunting or the discharge of firearms. If none of these hurdles are in your way, you have a ready-made deer hunting gold mine. The deer wander through your pansies in November just like they have been doing all year. All you need is patience, a simple blind or a tree stand or sometimes just a comfortable chair on the back porch, and you have venison. And, you've re-



Wire cages arched over row crops in the garden work well. High cages can protect young fruit trees.

tends to sleep all day and roam about alertly at night when the mostly nocturnal deer are pouncing on your petunias. This idea would probably work well on other animals also, like vandals and burglars. I said I hadn't tried this method of deer deterrence, but that's not quite true. A couple of years ago when we moved to the far suburbs my daughter's two-year-old Keeshond came along. This is a



house only to reappear with the deer in pursuit. It was a game, one that they both seemed to enjoy. The doe returned day after day for about two weeks to play chase with Guinness. Because of his breeding, he'll never be a fine deer diverter, but he had fun trying.

Hunting helps. The deer have used your roses for candy, eaten your veggies, filled up on your fine fruit and now it's fall. Your turn! First buy a hunting license, a bargain at \$12.50, and a deer, bear, turkey hunting license, again \$12.50. Now for

duced the herd size and possibly its negative affect on what you're trying to grow.

Think of hunting these particular deer as a fair trade. You have provided them with copious quantities of delicious green plants for six months or more, and now there's a fine venison roast in the oven. Bon Appetit! □

---

*Mel White works with the Communications and Information Division of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. He has been writing about and photographing Virginia's wildlife and natural resources for over 30 years.*

# Gold in the Woods



## White-out

by Carol A. Heiser  
illustrations by Spike Knuth

**S**ome years ago during my usual morning commute to Richmond along I-64 through Louisa County, I noticed a peculiar looking white bird hopping around with a flock of crows along the shoulder of the road, up ahead in the distance. As my car gradually got closer, I could see that the unusual bird was too big to be a white pigeon or some other species. To my surprise it was an albino crow, cavorting for insects alongside the best of them, oblivious to the traffic and apparently to its own bizarre

appearance, too. The white crow hung around with that flock for months, and I would see it almost every morning near the highway. The bird was an anomaly that managed to survive despite all odds. How is it that an animal which is supposed to be black turned out to be white?

## Why Albino

The answer lies deep within the genes, those powerhouses of diversity that drive natural selection. One gene in particular is responsible for causing an enzyme to direct the formation of melanin, a photo-protective pigment found in skin, fur, feathers, hair cells, and the iris and retina of the eyes. Pigments are useful compounds that block the passage of light or affect how light is absorbed. When our skin is exposed to the sun, melanin production increases, and the skin gradually becomes darker over time—we may notice this change as a “tan.” Because of the chemical properties of melanin, the pigment absorbs ultraviolet light and thereby protects skin from the sun’s damaging effects.

In humans, albinism is quite rare and affects about 17,000 people in the U.S. In order for a

human or other animal to inherit the traits of albinism, both parents must carry a recessive gene for the condition. If an animal is born with virtually no melanin—known as Type 1 albinism—then the skin and hair will be very pale or completely white. In Type 2 albinism, the animal’s skin cells may produce some melanin and have only a partially reduced ability to make the pigment because of a defect in a different gene. An albino may therefore be all white, like the crow I saw, or show some partial coloration, depending on the set of traits it has inherited.

Albinism is known to occur in all animal groups that produce melanin, including reptiles, amphibians, fish, and even insects. Domestic animals show the largest number of albinistic traits, such as laboratory mice, pet rabbits and guinea pigs. These animals are bred and cared for by humans specifically for their unusual coloration. In the wild, however, nature usually selects against albinism. A white animal in a typically green or brown environment will be an easy target for a predator to catch. A

white predator that does not blend in with its surroundings will be easy to spot by its prey, and it will have a harder time catching a meal. Imagine a white snake trying to catch a chipmunk with stealth! Albinos also tend to have a short life span because of other physical impairments that are sometimes associated with the condition.

## Red Eyes

Usually an albino exhibits some type of eye abnormality. Our eyes are able to see thanks to a specialized lining within, called the retina. The retina contains nerve cells which detect light and transmit these visual messages to the brain. If melanin is not present in the retina as the eye develops before birth, then an area of the eye called the fovea—where light concentrates to make a sharp image—fails to develop normally, and eyesight is adversely affected. Other nerve pathways between the retina and the brain may also not develop properly. These un-

Albinism happens when living organisms are born without normal amounts of pigment in their skin, scales, fur and feathers. To be affected by albinism it normally takes mutated genes from both parents.





Unlike the partially white robin (above) true albinos are normally characterized by their pink eyes, as is seen in the white crow below.

usual patterns of nerve signals can interfere with correct eye function, and depth perception may, therefore, be reduced. In addition, if the iris has very little or no pigment, then light which enters the eye will bounce off the retina and the blood vessels, causing a reddish reflection. Most albinos, therefore, appear to have red eyes. In people, however, the iris may vary in color from dull gray to blue or brown.

## Famous White Squirrels

There are a few towns in America where mysterious white squirrels have captured the imaginations of the residents and have attracted inquisitive tourists. In Brevard, North Carolina, for example, white squirrels are fairly numerous. It is believed that they originated in the Hawaiian Islands and were brought to this

country in the early 1940s as a novelty for carnival shows. The story goes that a circus caravan on a train overturned near Jacksonville, Florida, and a pair of squirrels escaped. The squirrels managed to survive and establish a small population in a pecan grove nearby. Another pair of squirrels were later captured from this population as pets and transported to North Carolina, where they eventually escaped or were released in Brevard. Subsequently, a population of white squirrels became established there as well.

There are still white squirrels found today in the Kissimmee and Panhandle areas of Florida. A large colony of white squirrels can be found in Marionville, Missouri, where the mascot appears on a large sign at the entrance to town which says, "Welcome to Marionville: Home of the White Squirrels." White squirrels also occur in Kenton, Tennessee, and in the Canadian town of Exeter, Ontario. In Olney, Illinois, the townspeople have nurtured a population of white squirrels since 1902, which once numbered 1,000 but is now about 200.

In some regions of the country, the white

squirrels have black eyes and gray markings on the back or a cream-colored belly. These animals are considered a white "morph" or variant of the gray squirrel, and the two will interbreed. Other white squirrels have red eyes, such as those mentioned in Illinois, which indicates albinism. However, it has not been conclusively proven whether or not the white squirrels found in these towns are all descended from the original caravan pair, or if the disparate populations are simply genetic anomalies that continue to recur naturally.

## White But Not Albino

What the squirrels of tourism fame do demonstrate is that not all albinos are pure white, and that not all white animals are albino. Polar bears of the arctic, for example, have normal eye color and are white for a different reason: camouflage in the snow. In this instance the color white conveys an adaptive advantage to the bears, because they are predators which must remain unseen if they will be successful at capturing prey. Polar bears are, therefore, "leucistic" but not albino.

Some animals are only white part of the year, such as the snowshoe hare, a nocturnal jackrabbit that occurs in the northwestern U.S.



The hare is brown during the summer when it must hide from predators in the forests and thickets it inhabits. During the fall, however, the hare molts the brown fur and grows a new coat of white for the winter, in order to blend in with the snow.

Only one in 30,000 white-tailed deer is an albino, a very rare occurrence. These animals have pink eyes and white coats but are normal in all other physical respects. Partially white or "piebald" deer are more common but suffer many physical abnormalities: curved spine, "Roman" nose, shortened legs, and malformed head and internal organs. Rare melanistic deer have excessive pigmentation and are black with normal eyes.

## Did You Know

The famed white tigers of Asia and India are not considered albinos, because they have pigmented stripes and blue eyes. These tigers are a variant, not a subspecies, of Bengal tigers. All tigers have stripes on their skin as well as their fur, although the stripes may not be as prominent on some individuals. Worldwide, the Bengal tiger population is estimated at only 5,000 to 7,000. White tigers are extremely rare and are housed in zoos as a conservation measure.

Above: Not all white animals are albinos, as is the case with this snowshoe hare. One quick way to tell the difference is in the eyes. If the eye color of the animal you see is a pinkish-red or pale blue it is an albino.



## Learning More

White Squirrel Research Institute of Brevard College, North Carolina, <http://tornado.brevard.edu/whitesquirrel/>

National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH), [www.noah.org](http://www.noah.org), a clearinghouse of information about the condition as it affects people.

"Unmasking Skin," article in the November 2002 issue of National Geographic magazine (<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/archives.html>). □

---

Carol A. Heiser is a Wildlife Habitat Education Coordinator with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Virginia  
Naturally



# Primetime Smallmouth



©Bill Lindner Photography

by Bruce Ingram

The advent of autumn brings lower water temperatures and, consequently, river smallmouths "go on feeding binges" in order "to put on weight for the winter." Or so the conventional wisdom among many stream brown bass aficionados goes. Here is another old saying about moving water mossbacks: river bass "school up come fall" in order to prey more effectively upon the diminishing schools of minnows.

*Cooler temperatures, clearer water and hungry fish create the perfect conditions for catching trophy size bronzebacks.*

Are these commonly held beliefs fact or fiction? And regardless, just what are the major phases that smallmouths go through from the end of summer in mid September, through mid December. The Vir-

ginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' biologist most responsible for keeping up with river smallmouths is Scott Smith. I asked him to help us better understand smallmouth behavior come autumn.

## Factor or Fiction:

*Come fall, river smallmouths feed more heavily in preparation for winter?*

"I think the fish probably do feed a little more in early fall—at least during the day—when the water

first starts to cool off," says Smith. "I don't know if anyone has ever figured out if the fish feed to put on weight for the winter, but anything is possible. Since their metabolic rates are controlled by temperature—one of the hazards of being cold blooded—that probably has as much to do with it as anything. My guess is that anglers perceive an increase in smallmouth feeding because the fish are more active during the middle of the day when most of the anglers are out."

The truth, then, is that in the summer, river brown bass often feed at night and during low light conditions such as dawn and dusk—times when few anglers are on the water to notice that behavior. As Smith states, more anglers notice bass feeding in the fall because the fish are more visible doing so. And as far as the old axiom about fish trying to put on weight for the winter, aren't all species of fish (and for that matter, all predators) always instinctively trying to feed and put on weight? That's what predators do—prey.

## Fact or Fiction:

*In fall, bass form schools in order to more efficiently attack prey?*

"I know that at certain times of the year (that is, at other times besides fall) the smallmouths do form loose groups, but not really a tight school like you see with minnows or shad," says Smith. "I've also seen that when the water becomes really cold—below 50 degrees—the larger fish seem to be grouped together. This may be where this myth originates."

The truth here, then, is that river smallmouths are likely to form "loose" schools as Smith states, when feeding conditions or circum-

Come autumn, look for Virginia's river and stream smallmouth to congregate in pools where they try to avoid fast moving water to conserve energy.



©Bruce Ingram

stances warrant—regardless of the season. For example, one July day on a tributary of the James River, I observed a “school” of four nice size smallmouths that had banded together to attack a small water snake that was desperately fleeing across the creek. The bass were so intent on their prey that when the snake finally slithered upon the shore, one of the smallies leaped part way upon the bank in one last desperate attempt to engulf the reptile. That incident was a “feeding frenzy” if I ever saw one. After the snake escaped, school was out, and the smallmouths went their separate ways.

Smith’s statement about smallmouths grouping together by size when the water temperature drops below 50 is a known fact. But this phenomenon typically occurs in the winter months and is a major reason why coldwater anglers often do extremely well—or poorly. The bigger smallmouths hold only in a few areas—often specific places in deep, rocky pools—and fishermen either find these places or don’t.

©Bruce Ingram



©Bruce Ingram



## The Stages of Autumn: The Low, Clear Water of Early Fall

Alec Burnett owns and guides out of the Shenandoah Lodge in Luray. Although he fishes with both spinning and fly fishing gear, he says the latter is often his choice in early fall—mid September to mid October—when the water is typically low, clear and still warm.

“The gentle presentation that a fly rod can offer is often the way to go then,” says Burnett. “In early fall, the water is usually as clear and as low as it will be all year, so being able to drop a fly down on the surface from a long way off and with a minimum of disturbance is key. The conditions

Top: Among the better soft plastic baits for fall are Mister Twister worms, tube baits, jig’n pigs, and Case Magic Stiks. Middle: Minnow patterns, such as these tied by Blane Chocklett, are great for the fall. Below: Soft plastic baits are often the best option when using spinning outfits.



are also why the best time to fish is typically very early and late in the day under low light."

For this topwater action, Burnett prefers topwater patterns such as Walt's or Bob's Poppers (in sizes 2 to 6) and damsel flies in sizes 6 and 8. The guide will also opt for a Crease fly, a foam body popper that is effective "when you don't want the big bloop." He admits that he does not like to fish during the middle of the day in early fall, but if he has to, he looks for deep-water ledges or seams and pockets below rapids.

"Strip a Wooly Bugger or a Mud-dler Minnow through deep water or where current exists," instructs Burnett. "Experiment with different size patterns and the speed of the retrieve. Use a sink tip leader or split shot to force a fly to descend as deep as possible."

## The Cold Fronts of October

Blane Chocklett operates Blue Ridge Fly Fishers in Roanoke and guides on the James and New rivers. Chocklett freely admits that an October cold front will leave the fish turned off and fishing extremely difficult.

"Usually, when an October cold front hits an area, I try to fish the middle of the day," he explains. "That's when the fish will be most active, relatively speaking. My goal is to fish slower and deeper and to be very patient and work an area hard before leaving it. Frankly, the cold temperatures and blue skies of an October cold front are a lot more typical than those instances when the fish are going on those 'feeding frenzies' that outdoor writers are always writing about."

Along with the slower and deeper presentation, the Roanoke guide narrows his focus to just two locales: deep-water ledges and dropoffs. He probes those places with size 2 and 4

crayfish patterns and two patterns that he has created: the size 2 Chocklett Sculpin and the similar size Chocklett Disc Minnow. All these flies are deployed on sink tip lines.

"Even though you will be fishing primarily along the bottom in deep pools, you still should be very careful with your casts," concludes Chocklett. "I stay well away from target areas and either make long casts from my drift boat or get out and wade. The fish are hard enough to catch without spooking them with sloppy casts or careless wading."

## The Plunging Temperatures of November

Just when anglers thought that the October cold fronts would be the worst thing they would have to contend with, along comes early November and, quite typically, rapidly decreasing water temperatures. Those cold, daylong rains that often arrive in early November can easily cause the water temperature to descend from the upper 50s into the

upper 40s over the course of a fort-night.

Normally when stream small-mouth fishing in the spring, summer, and fall, I bring along four rods and a wide assortment of lures. But when the water temperature plummets, I drastically reduce my arsenal. I primarily rely on a single bait-caster, a 6½-foot medium heavy Quantum Tour Edition, and a reel spooled with 10-pound-test Trilene XT.

Bait choice is similarly constricted. The only two baits I rely on are 6-inch Mister Twister Phenom worms and 4-inch Venom tubes. The smallies are not going to be moving far or fast to engulf a bait, and I want lures, like these soft plastic offerings, that can be inched along the bottom and, at times, left motionless for long intervals. To prevent snags, I prefer to Texas rig the worms and tubes; and to keep them on the bottom, I use sliding bullet sinkers, usually the ¼-ounce size.

One fall rule that I strongly believe in is that the colder the water temperature becomes, the more



©Bruce Ingram

Blane Chocklett of Roanoke with some of the minnow and crayfish patterns that he likes for fly-fishing during the fall.



river smallmouths shy away from current. No longer do I look for fish in the push water above a rapid or in the swift water below. Instead, I seek outside eddies, that is eddies adjacent to the faster water below a rapid. These eddies must contain laydowns or large rocks in order to draw brown bass.

I am not going to pretend that I experience "fall feeding frenzies." On a recent trip to the New River during this period, I caught only two smallies, a 12 and 15 incher, which fell for tubes dragged through eddies. And I went home feeling very good about my day on the water.

### Late Fall: More Challenges

Barry Loupe operates North Fork Guide Service and guides on the New and North Fork of the Holston. The Saltville resident says the biggest challenge of late fall, that is when the water temperature has permanently dropped below 50 degrees, is understanding where the fish congregate.

"At this time, smallmouths typically move to slack water areas near current but protected from it," says Loupe. "Good places to look for bass are deep-water ledges, log jams,

large boulders, and sandbars. These areas provide cover and, if crawfish and baitfish are also present, they may draw bass. I emphasize the word may. Smallmouths tend to congregate by size now in only a few places. One certain place may hold ten nice size smallmouths and five other very similar places may not hold a single fish.

"My method is 'low and slow,' patient, finesse fishing. Contrary to popular belief, smallmouths can become quite aggressive now, if the conditions are right, such as a three-day warming trend that raises the temperature several degrees. The problem is, though, that even these 'active' fish may only feed once or twice in a day. What seems like a wasted day for six or so hours may quickly turn into an awesome display of smallmouth action—that lasts all of 15 or 30 minutes. Perseverance is a key."

Loupe favors only a handful of baits now. Tubes, Case Magic Stiks, and  $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce Butch Neal handcrafted jigs tipped with Venom trailers are his go-to lures. He prefers a  $6\frac{1}{2}$ -foot medium heavy rod with a Browning reel, spooled with 8-pound-test.

I suppose the only definitive

Having a better understanding of the basic fall patterns when fishing Virginia's many rivers for smallmouth will quickly improve the quality of your fishing trips.

"facts" about fall river smallmouth fishing is that the season has many stages, the brown bass themselves undergo many moods, and the fishing can be very good or gosh awful. The next time some outdoor scribe waxes hot and heavy about "fall feeding frenzies" and "smallies schooling up," give the writer's words as much credence as you would those mythological tales you studied in high school about Zeus and his thunderbolts—in other words, not very much. □

---

Bruce Ingram is a nationally recognized outdoor writer and photographer. His book *The James River Guide: Fishing and Floating on Virginia's Finest* is a must read if you enjoy fishing for smallmouth bass. It's available at most local bookstores or call Ecopress at 1-800-326-9272.

Shenandoah Lodge  
1-800-866-9958

Blue Ridge Fly Fishers  
(540) 563-1616

North Fork Guide Service  
1-800-889-0139

# *Virginia Wildlife* OUTDOOR CATALOG

**2003**

**Limited Edition**

***Virginia Wildlife* Knife**

The fourth in our series of limited edition *Virginia Wildlife* knives has been customized by Bear Cutlery and made in the USA. Each knife is serial numbered and has *Virginia Wildlife* 2003 etched on the blade, an American eagle is engraved on the front bolster. This attractive folding knife has genuine bone handles and is approximately 8 inches when fully opened. Each knife comes in a solid cherry gift box with a collage of eagles custom engraved on the box cover. Limited quantities of our 2001 and 2002 edition, also gift boxed, are still available.

\$75.00

Item # VW-50



# *Virginia Wildlife* **OUTDOOR CATALOG**

## **Book Clock**

New for 2003, this decorative book style clock is crafted of solid cherry wood beautifully engraved with a vivid wildlife scene on the book side of the clock. The clock face is of old world décor, a collectors delight. Clock is 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" when opened. \$29.95

Item # VW-53



## **Pocket Timepiece**

Once again VDGIF offers our elegant Timepiece. Each watch has been crafted especially for VDGIF by the Jules Jurgensen Watch Company. These fine collectables are available with either a stag or an eagle, and each watch carries the VDGIF logo on the dial.

Very limited quantities available. Watches are sold on a first come basis.

\$59.95 or two for \$100.00

Item # VW-11 (Stag) VW-12 (Eagle)



## **Five piece Coaster Set**

Made of solid cherry. This attractive set of 4 wooden coasters is attractively packaged in a wooden box custom engraved with a cardinal on a dogwood branch.

\$19.95 Item # VW-34



## Yellow Lab Pups Tapestry Throw

Created from a photograph by Virginia photographer Dwight Dyke. These five Lab pups lay about in the warmth of their basket alongside the tools of their trade. This tapestry throw created exclusively for VDGIF is triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton, machine washable and measures approximately 52" x 69". \$39.95

Item # VW-35



## Buckles

Our 2003 bass and duck belt buckle collection is crafted of solid pewter with *Virginia Wildlife* engraved at the bottom of the buckle. Each buckle comes in a custom gift box with the VDGIF distinctive logo displayed. \$9.95 each

Item #VW-51 Bass VW-52 Duck

## Matching Yellow Lab Pups Tapestry Pillow

\$14.95 Item # VW-36

Item # VW-42

Item # VW-38

Item # VW-43

Item # VW-41

Item # VW-08



Photos by Dwight Dyke

## Virginia Wildlife Caps

Hats off to the new *Virginia Wildlife* caps that feature three unique designs. Each cap is 100% cotton, size adjustable and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo. \$11.95

High profile - deer – Item # VW-40  
Low profile - deer – Item # VW-39  
High profile - bass – Item # VW-38  
Low profile - bass – Item # VW-37

High profile - Camo With Black Letters – Item # VW-42  
High profile - Blaze Orange – Item # VW-43  
High profile - Camo With Tan Letters – Item # VW-41  
High profile - *Virginia Wildlife* – Item # VW-08  
Low profile - *Virginia Wildlife* – Item # VW-09



Item # VW-44

Item # VW-45

## Virginia Wildlife T-Shirts

New this year *Virginia Wildlife* T-shirts. Each shirt is 100% cotton and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* logo, and largemouth bass or white-tailed deer. Please specify size, M, L, XL, XXL and color, Grey, Navy, Tan, Teal, or Black when ordering. \$12.95

Largemouth Bass – Item # VW-45

White-tailed Deer – Item # VW-44



## Custom Walnut Plaque

Display your trophy fish or hunting certificates, as well as other awards, with this custom plaque. Each plaque contains two medallions commissioned by VDGIF.

Plaques are available in walnut. \$19.95

Item # VW-16



## Collectors Patches

The first set in a series to be issued each year. Our 2003 edition has been custom designed exclusively for VDGIF. One patch displays a deer in a woodland setting the other a black bear mother and cub. This first edition is sure to become a valued collectable. \$9.95 set of two

Item # VW-54

Item #	Name of Item	Qty.	Size	Color	Price	Total Price

Make checks payable to *Treasurer of Virginia* and mail to: *Virginia Wildlife Catalog*, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

Credit card orders can call (804) 367-2569

### Payment Method

check or money order    VISA    Mastercard



Account Number

Expiration

Signature

Please Print Name

Daytime Phone Number

**Subtotal**

**Shipping and Handling**

**6.95**

**Total**

### Shipping Information

Name

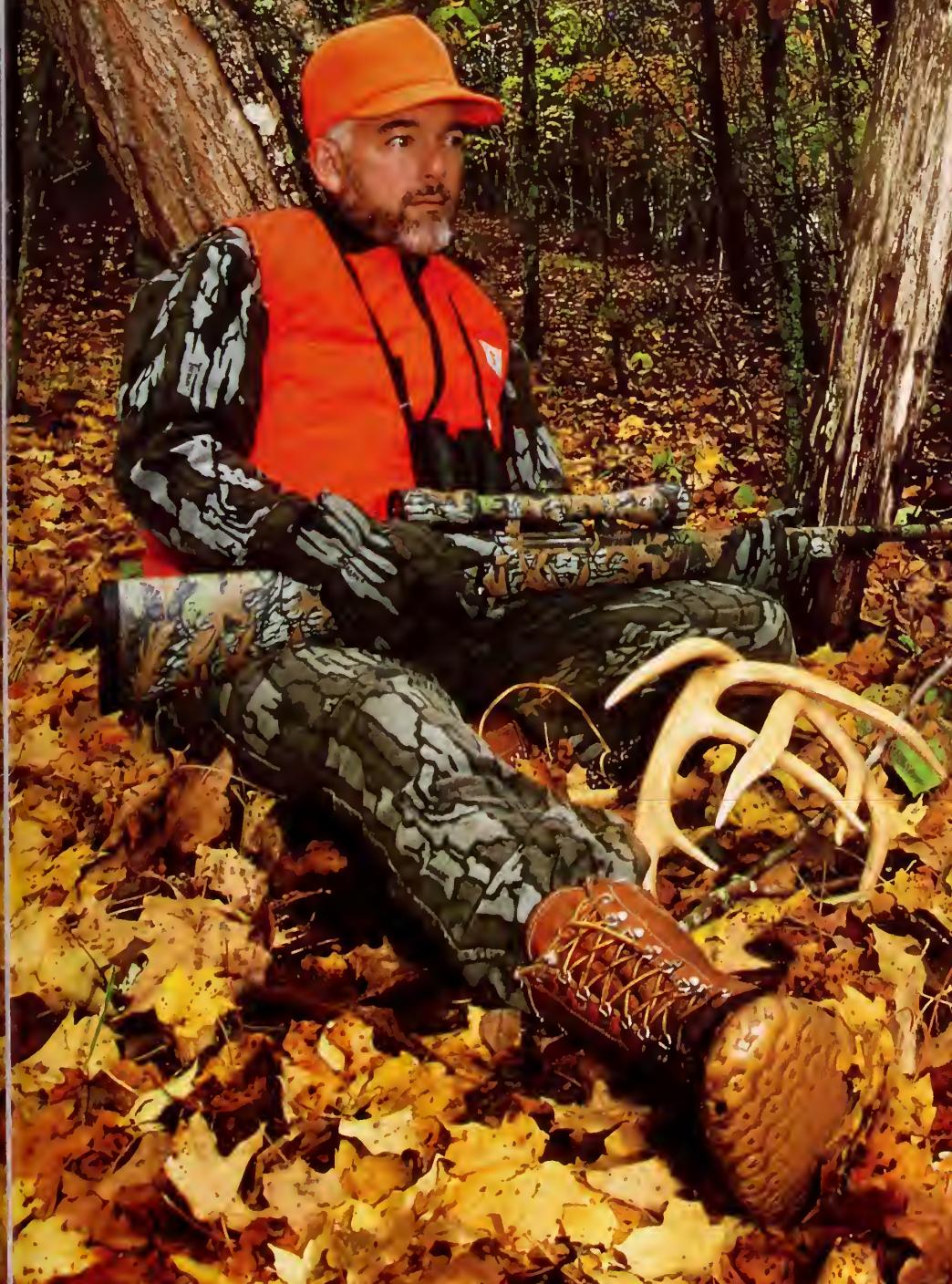
Address

City

State

Zip

# Hunting Whitetails 101



# *With the general firearms deer season scheduled to open on Saturday, November 15th this year, hunters are expected to be out in record numbers!*

by Denny Quaiff

**I**t was the second week of the 1996 gun season and I was starting to become frustrated and had nothing but hard luck stories to tell. I had passed up numerous small bucks during the early muzzleloading season and finally shot a heavy antlered 8 pointer on the last day. Although the buck was well within our club's management guidelines it fell short of my personal standards and suffered what is commonly referred to as "ground shrinkage."

With the general gun season now in full swing, the hunting pressure



Virginia gun hunters enjoy one of the most liberal seasons in the country. Here Denny Quaiff is pictured with the bucks mentioned in this article.

had increased greatly. My many years of past hunting experience continued to remind me that a mature buck was going to be tough to come by. Concentrating on the primary food sources, I used my portable climbing tree stand to put me on an oak ridge where the deer appeared to be feeding heavily. As the sun set in the western sky, I just had the feeling my luck was about to

change. All of a sudden a small herd of does came running up the ridge with a wide rack 9 pointer in hot pursuit. The mature animal stopped about 80 yards out in the open oaks where the crosshairs of my rifle-scope found the buck's left shoulder. Without hesitation I squeezed the trigger on my Remington 30-06 Mountain Rifle and breathed a sigh of relief when the big buck dropped on the hillside.

Stories like this play out time and time again each year with over 268,000 hunters taking to the deer woods in Virginia to chase whitetails in the fall. The general deer season is set to open for the first time on Saturday this year and hunters are expected to be out in record numbers. In hopes of increasing our odds, let's look at some of the basics and be better prepared for opening day.

## Pre-Season Range Work

Although it has been said over and over again to always zero your rifle or pattern your shotgun before the season opens, hunters continue to overlook this practice. This simple annual ritual can be the difference between putting venison in the freezer and going home empty handed.

The time spent at the range helps to satisfy two important things. First, make sure that your deer rifle or shotgun is tuned properly. This will ensure that if the opportunity presents itself you will know what your gun is capable of doing. Secondly, most hunters are not professional shooters and range work before the season builds confidence in ones ability to make tougher than average shots.

Let's talk about the centerfire rifle first. It would be advisable to look for a commercial range that has up to 100-yard targets. The Virginia Department of Game Inland Fisheries offers these facilities at some of their wildlife management areas. I like to fire three rounds in order to see how my rifle is grouping. At that point I make whatever adjustments are necessary to the windage and elevation in order to zero the rifle. It is my



©Dwight Dyke

opinion that by setting my scope 1 1/2 inches high at 100 yards the rest will take care of itself out to the 200 yard mark. Although there are some exceptions for long-range work, it is safe to say that under normal hunting conditions most shot opportunities will be less than 200 yards.

When discussing the shotgun for deer hunting remember that these scatterguns should be limited to 40 yards when loaded with buckshot and 100 yards when using a rifle slug. Much the same as with the centerfire rifle, it is advisable to use an approved shooting range with a good backstop for public safety. County ordinances often prohibit the discharge of guns in certain areas. When working up a load for buckshot, a large target is recommended for trying different shot sizes and manufacturer brands. If your gun comes equipped with different tub chokes experiment with these in order to achieve the best pattern density. Properly patterned and used at close range buckshot is deadly. When trying to push the envelope for distance beyond its effective range buckshot becomes useless. If



you prefer slugs you may decide to mount a scope or use rifle sights. Today, manufacturers are building slug barrels for shotguns that achieve accuracy comparable to centerfire rifles. Again, take the time to test different brands and determine which type performs best in your gun. If you are hunting in a shotgun only county, check the hunting regulation booklet and make sure that slugs are legal for deer hunting. Like many of you reading this text I have witnessed deer taken far beyond these stated distances and heard stories that were unbelievable. The purpose of this information is to give our readers reasonable guidelines to follow in order to humanely and safely harvest deer.

Taking the time to double-check your rifle and shotgun before opening day is each hunter's responsibility. This obligation goes with the territory and should never be overlooked in the interest of fair chase.

## Hunt the Food Sources

Throughout the deer season food sources will continue to change.



## Hunters for the Hungry

Old Dominion deer hunters can help the needy by donating venison through the Virginia Hunters for the Hungry program. Last year, the hunters program collected 266,456 pounds of venison for processing from outdoor sportsmen and women statewide. Thanks to these caring folks, over 1 million servings of good, nutritious, quality protein red meat were brought to the table for many poverty-stricken citizens of our great Commonwealth.

Each year since 1991, when the late David H. Horne started the program, the \$30 per deer processing fees has been the biggest problem. In an effort to help, the legislature at the Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution that will provide a check-off block on this year's hunting licenses that will send \$2 to Hunters for the Hungry. On June 18th, at a public ceremonial bill signing, The Honorable Governor Mark R. Warner completed the legislative process. This is a strictly voluntary option for all hunters when they purchase their license and has been a long-time in coming for an organization that continues to struggle, while helping people who are less fortunate.

Deer hunters who would like to donate venison to Hunters for the Hungry can write the organization at P. O. Box 304, Big Island, Virginia 24526 or call/e-mail 1-800-352-4868/[hunt4hungry@cs.com](mailto:hunt4hungry@cs.com). And don't forget to check "yes" when you purchase this year's hunting licenses and send \$2 to Hunters for the Hungry. With everyone working together, needy Virginians will continue to benefit and the Hunters for the Hungry program will continue to grow!



more secure feeding on acorns in the oak woods.

If you have permission to hunt farmland do not overlook the wintergreen fields. This short list includes wheat, rye and oats. All of these late winter crops attract deer like a magnet during cold days. I have found that accessing these areas in the morning is all but impossible since deer are often feeding at first light. However, these lush green agricultural sites are primary afternoon stands that can pay big dividends.

As the season progresses, soft mast, like Japanese honeysuckle and greenbriars, become the number one food source for deer in the Old Dominion. This cold weather food source is widespread throughout the state and hunters who do their homework will find deer using these areas religiously during the late season.

Deer hunters who know their property and keep notes of the different food source locations will have a definite edge. Knowing when these food sources change and how to properly set up without being detected by the deer is a formula for success.

### Watch the Weather Conditions

The whitetail deer has a built-in barometer and knows when low-pressure weather fronts are ap-

Hunting for deer often involves hunting for the food that they like to eat, which includes acorns.

©John R. Ford



proaching. Several years ago, I was playing cat and mouse with a certain buck and could never seem to catch up with him. It was getting late in the season and I was not about to let this challenge get the best of me. With the weatherman calling for sleet and freezing rain to start around dark, I headed to one of my tree stands. The stand overlooked a honeysuckle thicket on the edge of what I believed to be his bedding area.

The cold north wind indicated that the temperature was starting to tumble and the heavy cloud cover offered insurance that the weather forecast was going to be dead on the money. I had only 15 minutes of legal shooting time remaining when one small buck and several does showed up in front of my stand, feeding as the sleet started to fall. I sat with my rifle in the ready position until shooting time expired without seeing the buck that I had been after for weeks. With the falling weather intensifying, I started to climb down and caught a glimpse of what I believed to be an 18-inch wide, 8 pointer that I harvested from the same tree on opening day of muzzleloader season the next year.

Watch the weather forecast and pay close attention to unusual barometric changes. Wildlife will feed heavily in front of these major changes in the weather and very often never move for several days after severe ice and snowstorms move through.

## Making Drives

Pushing deer is another excellent way to bag whitetails. For the past three years, I have been taking a trip to Iowa and hunting with the good folks at Knight Rifles. The gun season opens on the first Saturday in December in that part of the country, and one of the primary ways for hunters to enjoy success is by making man drives. With the primary rut over, bucks and does alike are lying tight.

This same method of organized man drives has been used very successfully in Virginia. When we start

to get into late December and January, about the only way to get whitetails to move is to all but step on them. In a deer drive situation, you kick the deer out of their beds causing them to move. My hunting party usually likes to have two or three hunters walk through prime bedding areas with five to six standers waiting on the other end for the deer to use their escape route. On several days last year this small hunting party harvested as many as five deer using this technique.

Man driving deer can be particularly effective on big bucks. It is my opinion that the only thing that makes old bucks harder to hunt than any other deer is that they are more nocturnal. It is simply impossible to pattern an animal you never see during legal shoot hours.

Another popular means of hunting deer in eastern Virginia is organized dog drives. Hunting deer with dogs was the way that I got started, and I must admit that a good hound chase still makes my blood boil.



©Soc Clay

Using specially trained dogs is a popular method of hunting deer where there is thick cover and deer are hard to move.

Most dog hunts consist of larger groups hunting together that usually have a hunt master in order to keep things organized. The dogs do the work and move deer to standers that are posted on noted deer crossings throughout the property. Clubs and landowners who use dogs typically need larger blocks of land in order to achieve their harvest ob-

jects. Dog drives are only legal during the general gun season and are a proven way of effectively taking whitetails.

Driving deer is not all a bed of roses. It requires a great deal of planning in order to have things work in your favor. I think it is only fair to warn our readers that regardless of whether you decide to man drive your property, or release a pack of hounds, it would be safe to say that the deer living on your land will become nocturnal for the remainder of the season.

## Conclusion

Today the bow and muzzleloader seasons play major roles in Virginia's Deer Management Plan and offer more opportunities for hunters. Both of these seasons are considered a deer management tool to help control a statewide whitetail herd that is estimated to be over 900,000 animals. However, these special seasons only represented 32 percent of the harvest that totaled 213,023 animals this past year. With two weeks of hunting in the mountains and seven weeks open in the east, Virginia's deer hunters enjoys one of the most liberal gun seasons in the country.

Before hunting be sure to read the hunting regulation booklet and contact your local game warden with any questions. This year more opportunities for hunters have been made available with increases in bag limits and longer seasons in some of the counties west of the dog line. Department officials will be the first to admit that gun hunters are the bread and butter of this well designed Deer Management Program.

So this year, get out and do some serious deer hunting. Learn to see beyond the obvious and don't overlook the basics. Then pick your hunting time carefully, climb into your stand, be safe! □

---

*Deuny Quaiff is the senior editor of Whitetail Times the official magazine of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association; [www.virginiadeerhunters.org](http://www.virginiadeerhunters.org).*



# Eyes of an Artist

*Virginia artist, Ron Louque, wins the most prestigious waterfowl art competition in the world and now finds himself soaring with his subjects.*

by Bob Gooch

As I knocked on the door of Ron Louque's comfortable Charlottesville home and awaited his welcome, I glanced around and my eyes fell on a stack of driftwood on the patio. "I use that for mounts," he said, noticing my interest, as we entered the comfort of his air-conditioned house. It was a typically hot July day. "Picked it up at the reservoir when the water was so low last year."

I was puzzled. What would an artist need mounts for? Then inside, my eyes settled on a beautifully mounted ruffed grouse. "You mount it?" He replied that he did, but quickly added that he did not do taxidermy work professionally. "Just for my own pleasure."

## An Artist's Life

Ron Louque, a wildlife artist for much of his adult life, received national acclaim when he won the 2003 Federal Duck Stamp Contest, a truly prestigious award. Waterfowlers across Virginia will be treated to his work when they purchase their 2003-04 Federal Migratory Bird and Conservation Stamp better known as the "duck stamp." It features Louque's winning artwork, a pair of snow geese flying over Virginia's Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and Assateague Island, a highly fitting scene for a Virginia artist's winning entry in the national contest.

He chose the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the Assateague Island setting for the contest because the Federal officials had requested that entries feature a national wildlife refuge in the background to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Assateague lighthouse, which is located in the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, helped identify the location. "The glowing beacon of the lighthouse added a perfect touch," he said. "I added the band on the left leg

©John R Ford



At a recent VDGIF board meeting, Director William L. Woodfin, Jr., was presented with one of the first copies of the new 2003-2004 Federal Waterfowl and Bird Conservation print by Ron Louque. To help benefit wildlife management in Virginia, Ron has offered to donate one-third of the proceeds from the sale of the print to the Department. To help us take advantage of this generous offer please mention that you read this information in *Virginia Wildlife* magazine. If you would like to purchase a print contact Ron by calling (434) 975-1864 or online at [www.duck-stamp03.com](http://www.duck-stamp03.com).

in the foreground as a tribute to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service." The federal duck stamp program was established in 1934.

Ron Louque was born in New Orleans in 1952, but when he was a mere toddler of two his family left the big city and moved 50 miles up the Mississippi River to the rural community of Donaldsonville along the banks of the famous river. Hunting and fishing were big there, and hunting particularly helped shape young Louque's life. An early introduction to hunting and fishing has spawned burning interests in many young people who have gone on to successful careers in conservation, wildlife management, forestry, outdoor writing, wildlife art and other outdoor related professions.

By the time he was 6 years old, Louque was exploring the bayous

along the Mississippi River with his Red Rider Daisy air rifle occasionally bagging a starling or English sparrow, both pest birds. When he was a mere 11 years old, he and a friend set out duck decoys on the nearby Mississippi River and concealed themselves along the bank. Pretty soon a flock of wood ducks flew by and a youthful Louque managed to drop one, which fell well out in the strong Mississippi current. Despite the fact that it was a cold November morning, he stripped to his underwear and waded out to retrieve the duck. Teeth chattering, he made it back to shore with his prize. Using his newly



©John R. Ford

acquired taxidermy skills, he preserved his trophy.

Hunting and fishing were big in Louque's young life, but they led him into a deeper interest and love for the natural world.

Taxidermy was his first step toward a lifetime career as a wildlife artist. He enrolled in a taxidermy correspondence course when he was 9 years old, and taxidermy became a passion throughout his teenage years.

He entered Louisiana State University in 1970 as a wildlife major, but quickly switched to ornithology and zoology which were more closely allied to his continuing interest in birds.

His introduction to wildlife art came in 1972 through the curator of the Louisiana State University museum of natural history. Later he met a pair of artist-ornithologists, John O'Neill and Douglas Pratt, both zoology graduate students and

painters of birds. From them he learned the fine techniques of illustrating birds. The well-known Russian-German artist, Adolph Sehring, also helped him to understand the importance of light and composition in his painting. One of the duck stamp judges Tom Fulgham, editor of *Ducks Unlimited* magazine commented on this aspect of Louque's winning entry, "His painting is a very effective use of light. The sky is dark and stormy, kind of moody. The white snow geese just pop up dramatically." Fulgham, incidentally, is a native Virginia waterfowl hunter who grew up hunting ducks on the tidal James River and still returns there annually to hunt. He was the editor of the *American Hunter* before moving to Memphis, Tennessee, to become editor of the *Ducks Unlimited* magazine.

The modern computer became a valuable tool in Louque's career. "With the aid of a high-tech programs and digital imaging software, I am able to explore numerous composition possibilities that I would not have had time to do in the traditional methods with pencil, paint and paper," said the Virginia wildlife artist.

Ron Louque's first attempt at painting came in 1971. During the autumn of that year he painted a Maryland yellowthroat bird from a book called *Birds of America*. It was a beginning, but as he gained experience he began using his vast knowledge of birds gathered through hunting, roaming the bayou country, and his taxidermy work to create his own unique paintings of Louisiana birds. Within a couple of years he was selling his paintings for good prices.

In 1974 he abandoned his studies in ornithology and kicked off a successful career as a professional wildlife artist. Louque met his wife at Louisiana State University where they were both students. She was from Orange, Virginia, and in 1983 they moved to her home county. It was here that he was introduced to an entirely different landscape and wildlife in the Blue Ridge Mountains and foothills. Over the years he has

painted, in addition to birds and mammals, European inspired landscapes, figurative portraits and still lifes.

Waterfowl continue to be his favorite subject though his prints include a wider variety of subjects.

Louque's work has brought him attention over his 30-year career.

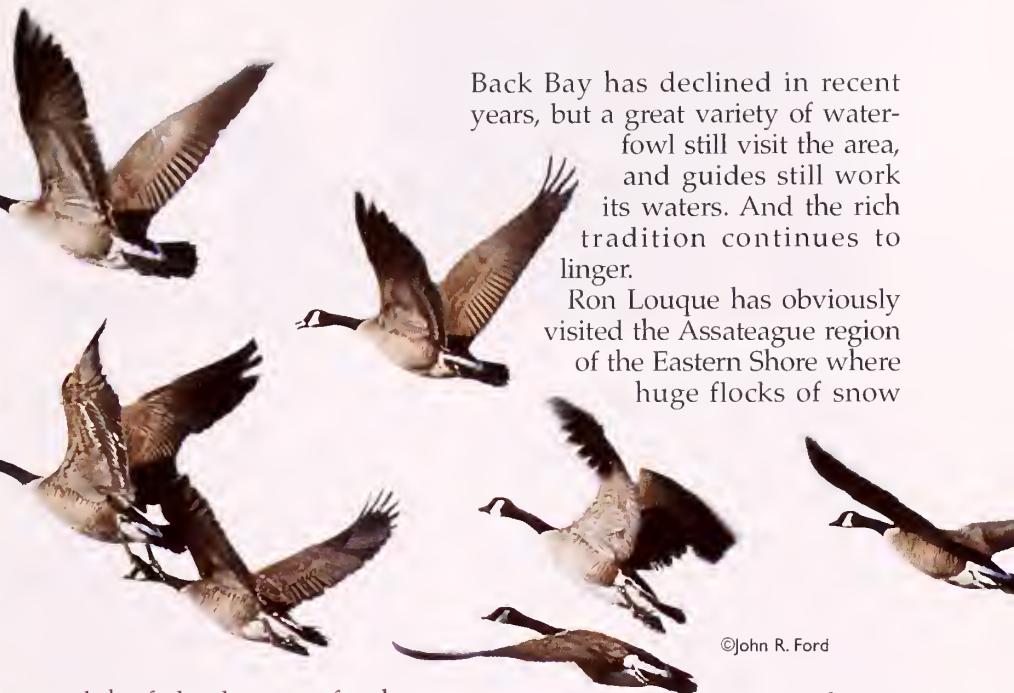
Among his awards was the Ward Foundation's World Champion Wildlife Master title in 1984, and he was the American Masters Foundation Recipient in 1978. There



The 142-foot high Assateague Lighthouse, which was built in 1867 to help ships navigate the dangerous waters off the Eastern Shore, helps to identify the location that Ron featured in his award-winning work of art.

have also been many magazine covers including *Audubon*, *Ducks Unlimited*, *Louisiana Conservationist* magazines and others.

Over the years he has won 27 state conservation stamp art contests. He



Back Bay has declined in recent years, but a great variety of waterfowl still visit the area, and guides still work its waters. And the rich tradition continues to linger.

Ron Louque has obviously visited the Assateague region of the Eastern Shore where huge flocks of snow

geese leave the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge every dawn to feed in the nearby fields. Waterfowl hunting and decoy carving are a big part of the rich Eastern Shore culture.

More recently, thanks to improved public access to the major inland rivers and the advent of light canoes and cartop boats, jump shooting for ducks has brought waterfowl hunting to inland Virginia. The colorful little wood duck is a favorite, but mallards and other species use our inland waterways.

Ron Louque spoke of the large flocks of Canada geese in the Charlottesville area, one of the major regions in the state for the big resident Canadas that live out their lives in Virginia. "I'm having trouble finding a place to hunt them," he said. "I would like to experience a typical field hunt for geese," he added. "I want to view the whole operation, the big spread of decoys, the blinds, hunters and retrieving dogs, and the geese overhead."

Words from the lips of a waterfowl hunter and a professional wildlife artist whose love of the outdoors and wildlife continues to help him to reach for new heights. □

---

Bob Gooch has been writing about Virginia's great outdoors for over 40 years and is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine.



# Journal

## 2003 Outdoor Calendar of Events

**October 3-5:** Eastern Shore Birding Festival. For more information call (757) 787-2460 or visit [www.esachamber.org/festivals/birding](http://www.esachamber.org/festivals/birding).

**October 4-5:** United Kennel Club Beagle World Championship Hunt, Saltville, Va. For more information contact Randy Smith at (276) 496-4870. □

**November 22:** Generation Deer Hunt, Occoquan Bay National Refuge. For information call (804) 367-1147.

**November 24:** Women's Deer Hunt, Occoquan Bay National Refuge. For information call (804) 367-1147.



### Around the Campfire Quack Calls!

by Jennifer Worrell

A certain wildlife magazine editor, who would like to remain anonymous, learned a valuable lesson on an early morning duck hunt with a couple of friends last year. The three were making their way into a blind at Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, along with a very eager retriever that took joy in bouncing about, shaking ice-cold water and mud all over them. After struggling in the dark to get the decoys out the excited hunters, slipping and sliding in mud up to their knees, return to the blind ready to hunt. Covered in mud, wet and cold the hunters had some choice words

about their rough start to the morning. With duck calls in hand all three began a barrage of sweet sounding quacks, which was then quickly broken by the sharp ringing sound of a cell phone. Its high-pitched sound could be heard echoing for miles in the clear morning air, sending the three hunters scrambling to find whose phone it was. When the phone was finally located and quickly answered the distraught voice of the wife of one of the hunting partners could be heard loudly shouting that someone was making obscene phone calls to the house and they were still on the line! She had called on her cell phone, so she could hold it up to her bedside phone so her husband could hear what was being said.

What the hunters heard were their own voices on the other phone and their happy retriever splashing about ready to bring back some ducks. The stunned magazine editor finally realized that he had forgotten to secure his own cell phone, which was rattling loose in his hunting bag, and that it had inadvertently hit the "send" button, which had his hunting partner's home phone number logged in. His friend's wife had heard all their frustrations that morning, quacks and all, in great detail. After a good laugh and assurances that there was nothing to worry about, all three hunters turned off their cell phones and got back to the business of the day of calling ducks. □

### Virginia Junior Duck Stamp 2003 Contest Winner

by Cheryl A. Sagers

This year's Virginia's *Best of Show* winner of the Junior Duck Stamp Contest is Robert Swisher, a senior at

Woodbridge Senior High School, Woodbridge, Virginia. His picture of a matched pair of pintail ducks is done in colored pencil. Robert's duck picture along with other winning duck pictures will travel around the country for a year.

Robert entered the contest last year in Mrs. Sagers' art class and won a second place ribbon. This year



his goal was to do better. He studied last year's winning entries and added more color, detail and emotional impact to his work.

Mrs. Sagers shows the Junior Duck Stamp video, *Conservation Through the Arts* by the U.S. Dept. of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She brings in taxidermy duck lamps and mounts from home for the students to draw. Both she and her husband believe conservation is important and belong to several organizations such as Ducks Unlimited. □

### Special Deer Hunt for the Physically Disabled

The Virginia Department of Forestry will hold its 12th deer hunt for physically disabled persons during the 2003 deer season. The New

Kent Forestry Center has held successful deer hunts for physically challenged persons the past 11 years during shotgun season. Hunt days have been scheduled for the 2003 season on December 13 and 20. November 22 has been reserved for a group from McGuire VA Hospital and December 6 has been reserved for a group from Sheltering Arms Hospital. You may contact the Department of Forestry, if you would like to hunt on one of the hospital days, in case an opening is available.

In order to participate in this year's hunt, hunters must have a physical disability which significantly limits their mobility while hunting. The hunter may bring an assistant, who will also be allowed to hunt. Both hunters must possess a valid Virginia hunting license and big game stamp. The daily limit will be two deer of either sex. Biological data will be collected from every deer to plan future herd management. Deer stands are easily accessible by vehicle and many consist of a ramp and platform for wheelchair accessibility.

To apply for participation, hunters must submit the following: 1) a 3" X 5" index card with name, address, social security number, phone number, age, assistant's name and first three choices of dates; 2) disability verification; and 3) preference for a natural stand or a stand with a platform and ramp, and send to New Kent Forestry Center, 11301 Pocahontas Trail, Providence Forge, VA 23140. This information must be received by **October 10, 2003**. To receive confirmation, applicants must enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Dates will be assigned on a first come basis and there after by a random drawing if needed. For all hunters who would like to consider being on a standby lottery in case there is a cancellation, please indicate so on your return letter.

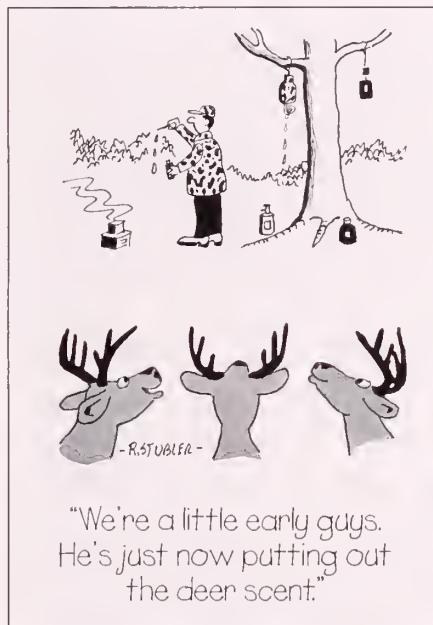
What constitutes a disability in being able to hunt in a Special Deer Hunt?:

Since the hunt began, only one of three types of verification has been required from the perspective hunter: 1) a letter from a doctor stat-

ing the person is permanently disabled, 2) a special hunting license from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, or 3) a copy of a handicapped license plate.

In the letter that we mail to those interested in the hunt, we simply state, "In order to participate in this year's hunt, hunters must have a physical disability which significantly limits their mobility while hunting." However, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries requires that a person be **permanently disabled** in order to receive a Virginia Disabled Resident Special Hunting License in case you want to purchase one.

For more information, call 804-966-2201. □



## UKC Beagle World Championship Hunt

by David Hart

An army of rabbit hunters will descend upon Saltville on October 4 and 5 to participate in the United Kennel Club Beagle World Championship Hunt. They won't, however, be carrying guns, says Joe Robinson, a member of the Saltville Beagle Club.

"These competitions award points strictly by how well the dogs work. Points are awarded for the dog that strikes the first scent and the

first one to actually run a rabbit in view of the judges and handlers. The dogs also get points based on their speed and how well they run the rabbit," explains Robinson. "They lose points if they bark and never produce a rabbit. It's very competitive."

Four hunters and their dogs are chosen at random and are accompanied by a judge and a local guide to a nearby farm to hunt wild cottontails. Contestants are allowed two hours of hunting and try to accumulate as many points as possible within that time. Robinson expects well over 100 beagles; hunters are allowed to enter only one dog.

Although championship beagles can bring top dollar, there is no money awarded for this competition, according to Robinson.

"There are trophies and plaques awarded, but it's really for the bragging rights of who has the best dog," he says.

This event is only open to hunters who have qualified through prior UKC beagle events, but the public is invited to watch the dogs and their handlers in the field.

For more information, contact Saltville Beagle Club president Randy Smith at (276) 496-4870. □

## Get HIP!

All migratory bird hunters need to register in 2003 with Virginia's Harvest Information Program (HIP). Hunters (whether licensed or exempt from being licensed) who plan to hunt doves, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Virginia Harvest Information Program. HIP is required each year and a new registration number is needed for the 2003-2004 hunting season. To obtain a new number, hunters can register online at [vahip.com](http://vahip.com) or call 1-888-788-9772. (NOTE: This is a new number from previous years, calling any other number will not get hunters registered.) □

## Report Wildlife Violations

1-800-237-5712

# SCUBA CUBA



©John Odenkirk



©John Odenkirk

by John Odenkirk  
VDGIF Fisheries Biologist

The addition of fish habitat to aquatic systems has been an integral part of fisheries management—both in fresh and saltwater—for years. Habitat structures have been deployed to increase angler catch rates, make up for the lack of quality fish habitat, create nursery areas for young fish and create holding/feeding areas for adult fish. Work of this nature also is important in fostering stewardship among resource constituents. The need for additional habitat is especially strong in large southeastern reservoirs created primarily for flood control and power generation. Frequently these systems were “scraped clean” and, over time, lost what little cover remained. Fishing clubs, fisheries managers, concerned anglers and others have attempted to remedy this situation with the addition of artificial habitat structures. These structures have run the gamut of materials (from tires to trees) and sizes. Recently, VDGIF biologists evaluated some of these more recent efforts with SCUBA gear at Lake Anna.

Three types of habitat structures in 9600-acre Lake Anna, Virginia were evaluated in 2000-2002. Dives were made from May-September below Route 208 (due to visibility

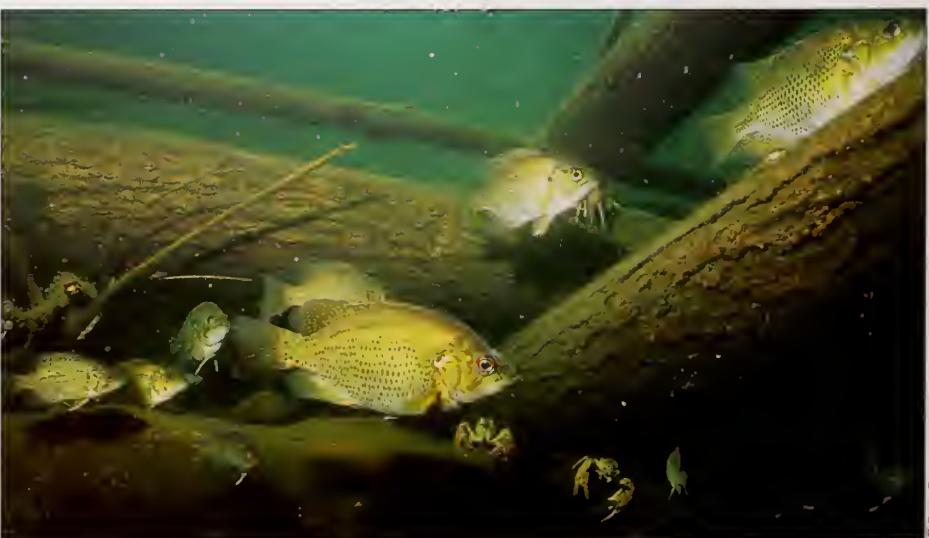
constraints), and each dive lasted about 20 minutes. Two divers descended to the structures and slowly worked around each recording observations (species and size categories) on slates. Structures were located in water depths of 12-22 feet, and (at the time of this writing) all were marked with indicator buoys. Structure types included synthetic Berkley “fish habs”® and “dumbos” (an arrangement of 6-inch diameter corrugated drainpipe) and a conglomerate of cedar trees, block and dumbos (dubbed “ combos”). The long-standing controversy regarding synthetic vs. natural structures was about to heat up! (Natural materials have been demonstrated to have superior fish holding ability initially, but their utility is lost after a few years).

Over three years, 26 dives were made on eight structures (four fish hab, two dumbo and two combo). Fish habs were aligned with the slats either on a horizontal or vertical plane and zip tied together in bunches of 7-20 units. Data analysis indicated some significant differences:

fish hab and combo structures held more quality largemouth bass, but black crappie and bluegill were more abundant on combo structures. Whether this was due to the presence of natural materials or the nature of the mixture (heterogeneity) is unknown. Bass, crappie, redear, white catfish and channel catfish selected horizontal slat alignment on fish habs exclusively, while bluegill selected horizontal and vertical alignments equally. Thus, the horizontal arrangement is recommended.

Correlations with physical parameters suggested a negative relationship between crappie and quality-size bass abundance and water temperature. Additionally, a negative relationship existed between bluegill and small bass abundance and depth, while a positive relationship existed between channel catfish abundance and depth.

This study suggests that fish habs are a viable alternative to natural materials, but a larger sample size of all structure types and more rigorous statistical analysis are needed. □



©Eric Engbretson



# On The Water

by Jim Crosby

## A Personal Locator Beacon

*"Search and Rescue is About to Change in The U.S."*

A new personal locator beacon is now available for the shirt pocket of extreme outdoor sports enthusiasts. The Federal Communications Commission has, as of July 1, approved the sale and use of an emergency-transmitting beacon designed for use on land that is comparable to units being used on the water and in airplanes. Previously approved and sold in Canada, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Australia; this will be the first time that such satellite-detectable emergency beacon technology will be available for land-use in the U.S. with the exception of Alaska, where PLBs have been permitted previously.

The new PLB can be a lifesaver for any extreme outdoor sports enthusiast operating in remote areas because it has a successful track record in the countries it has already been serving including the state of Alaska.

EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicator Radio Beacons) have been used on the water and ELTs (Emergency Locator Transmitters) on airplanes for many years. When activated, they send a signal to GEOSAR, a series of geo-stationary satellites, and COSPAS-SARSAT, a series of polar orbiting satellites operating on a radio frequency of 406 MHz. COSPAS-SARSAT is a search and rescue system that uses United States and Russian satellites to detect and locate emergency beacons indicating distress.

When activated, the personal, aviation and marine models send a coded signal to the satellites that is relayed to the U.S. Mission Control

Center in Suitland, Md. Operating under the auspices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the unique signal is matched to the beacon owner's registration data. The call for help for land based emergencies is then forwarded to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Langley AFB here in Virginia. The signal with the location and individual data is then forwarded to the closest rescue center. The units also have a radio beacon transmitter operating on 121.5 MHz that can be used as a homing signal to help rescuers zero in on the exact location of the distress call with the use of directional antennas. All military and most civilian aircraft monitor the emergency frequency of 121.5 for distress calls.

The satellite system radio beacons are only to be used in situations of grave and imminent danger and only as a last resort when all means of self-rescue have been exhausted. False signals will result in severe fines. Small, lightweight, waterproof and buoyant; they are the perfect complement to the outdoorsman's safety gear because they take the search out of search and rescue. The units are powered by a 5-year lithium battery and are capable of continual transmission for over 24 hours. The PLB from ACR has a National Marine Equipment Accessory interface (NMEA #0183) for connecting to a Global Positioning System receiver to transmit latitude and longitude for even more precise location data. It weighs 17.6 ounces and measures 1.9 inches thick by 6.5

inches tall and its 3.8 inches wide – equivalent to a small, handheld, two-way radio.

The ACR Electronics Inc. advises, "We have two models of PLB ready to hit the market, The GyPSI 406 PLB product #2793 with the optional GPS interface, and the 406 PLB product #2792. Both of these models have the same specs and dimensions. The only difference is the ability to interface with an external GPS. We expect to see street prices for the GyPSI to be under \$740 and the 406 PLB under \$640. A few national chains have picked up the PLB. REI, Boater's World and West Marine are among the first." For additional information, you can contact Chris Wahler, director of marketing at ACR Electronics, Inc ([www.acrplb.com](http://www.acrplb.com)). The address is 5757 Ravenswood Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312. His e-mail address is [cwahler@acrelectronics.com](mailto:cwahler@acrelectronics.com). □



Courtesy of ACR Electronics, Inc.

# RECIPES

by Joan Cone

## Without Duck Stamps - No Ducks!

**S**ince 1934, when the first duck stamp was purchased, more than 647 million dollars has gone towards conserving wildlife habitat greater in size than the state of Massachusetts. This land has provided homes for waterfowl and countless other wetland species. Duck stamp purchases have conserved over 5 million acres.

### Menu

*Double Decker Triscuit Pizza  
Cranberry Wood Ducks  
Potato And Goat Cheese Gratin  
Stuffed Acorn Squash  
Cinnamon Apple Muffins*

### Double Decker Triscuit Pizza

32 Triscuit crackers  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup spaghetti or pizza sauce  
1 cup Mozzarella cheese

Spread crackers with sauce and top evenly with cheese. Stack 1 topped cracker on top of second topped cracker for each pizza snack. Place 8 of the snacks on microwavable plate. Microwave on High for 45 to 50 seconds or until cheese is melted. Repeat with remaining snacks. Serve warm. Makes 16.

### Cranberry Wood Ducks

Larry Johnson, a friendly hunter from Williamsburg, brought me a pair of wood ducks which I used for this recipe.

Breasts, split with back bone removed, from 2 wood ducks or similar ducks  
Salt and pepper to taste  
2 tablespoons butter or margarine  
1 cup canned whole cranberry sauce  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 cup chicken broth  
3 tablespoons bottled steak sauce

1 tablespoon brown sugar  
2 teaspoons Dijon-style mustard

Salt and pepper duck breasts. Melt butter in a large skillet and brown breasts on both sides. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine remaining ingredients. After breasts have browned, pour sauce over them. Bring sauce in skillet to a boil, cover, and simmer until desired doneness is reached. Spoon sauce over ducks when serving. Allow 1 small duck per person. This recipe can be doubled for breasts from 4 small or 2 large ducks.

### Potato and Goat Cheese Gratin

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  pounds russet potatoes, peeled, cut into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick rounds  
3 teaspoons flour  
3 teaspoons minced fresh chives  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried thyme  
1 package (5.5-ounces) goat cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)  
Salt and pepper to taste  
 $1\frac{1}{4}$  cups milk

Preheat oven to 350° F. Lightly oil a 10-inch glass pie dish. Slightly overlap  $\frac{1}{3}$  of potato slices in bottom of dish. Sprinkle 1 teaspoon flour, 1 teaspoon chives and part of thyme over potatoes. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and dot with  $\frac{1}{3}$  of goat cheese. Repeat layering 2 more times. Pour milk over potatoes. Cover dish with aluminum foil and bake 45 minutes. Remove foil and bake until potatoes are tender and top is golden, about 20 minutes longer. Serves 4.

### Stuffed Acorn Squash

4-6 small acorn squash, cut in half and seeded  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup diced celery

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup diced onion  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup orange juice  
1 package (16 ounces) baby sweet peas  
1 tablespoon corn starch  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chicken broth  
2 teaspoons honey  
Salt and pepper to taste  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup Craisins

In a 9 x 13-inch pan, place squash upside down. Add water and bake in a preheated 250° F. oven for 25-35 minutes or until tender. Set aside. In a medium saucepan, heat oil. Add celery and onion and cook 5 minutes or until tender. Add orange juice and peas and cook 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Whisk together corn starch and chicken broth. Stir into pea mixture and cook until mixture thickens. Remove from heat and stir in honey, salt, pepper and craisins. Scoop  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup pea mixture in each warmed squash. Allow  $\frac{1}{2}$  or whole squash per person depending on size.

### Cinnamon Apple Muffins

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups flour  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup butter, melted  
1 egg, slightly beaten  
1 cup finely chopped apple

Preheat oven to 375° F. Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and cinnamon in medium bowl. Add all remaining ingredients. Stir just until flour is moistened. Spoon batter into greased 12-cup muffin pan. Bake for 18 to 23 minutes or until lightly browned. Let stand 5 minutes and remove from pan. Makes 12 muffins. □



Virginia's Finest



# Naturally Wild

story and illustration  
by Spike Knuth



## Common Moorhen

*Gallinula chloropus*

Once known as the Florida or common gallinule, in 1983, its official ornithological-correct name was designated as "common moorhen." Its closest relative is the purple gallinule, a more southerly species, which is occasionally found in Virginia. The two are listed as moorhen and gallinule in the migratory bird hunting regulations.

Among its other names are meadow hen, red-billed mud hen, pond chicken, and "pad-walker." Its scientific names are gallinula, meaning "little hen" in Latin, chloropus, meaning "green-footed" in Greek, and cacinanas, which is Latin for "laughing." In other words a "laughing, green-footed, little hen!"

The moorhen is 12 to 15 inches long. Its color is dark bluish-gray on its head and breast fading to brownish gray on its upper back. It has a red frontal plate and a chicken-like red bill, which is tipped with yellow. It has an inverted V-shaped white patch on its under tail coverts, and a narrow white line or streak outlining its flanks. Its legs and feet are yellowish and its toes are long and slender, which distributes the bird's weight, enabling it to walk on floating vegetation, such as lily pads, hence the nickname "pad-walker." It also has a habit of twitching or jerking its tail, and bobbing its head as it walks or swims. The moorhen's call consists of chicken like clucks, shrieks and laugh-like squawks.

Moorhens occur virtually all over the world, except Australia. However, it is not especially abundant anywhere in these areas and, because of its secretive habitation of marshes, it is seldom observed. Moorhens in-

habit freshwater marshes although they will be found close to salt or brackish marshes. They hold close to thick emergent vegetation for protection, and are capable of swimming and diving when they have to.

In the eastern United States common moorhens breed as far north as New Brunswick. Nesting begins in late-April or early May. A platform of floating aquatic vegetation is constructed and attached to the stems of living emergent vegetation, such as reeds, rushes, or cattails. On occasion, they may build in thick shrubby growths in the marsh, as long as it's close to the water's edge.

An average of eight to 10 eggs are laid. They are buff-colored and mottled with numerous darker markings. In their southern breeding areas, they may raise two broods. The eggs hatch in 21 days, resulting in downy black little chicks. Both parents assist in the brooding and feeding, and the young grow fast on the abundant food sources found in a freshwater marsh. Moorhens feed on a variety of aquatic plant seeds,

pondweeds, insect larvae, aquatic insects, worms and snails.

Moorhens migrate in September-October and, although it is associated with marshland and coastal areas, they can end up and set down in some seemingly out of the way places, including inland mountain valleys, marshy ponds, wet meadows, streams, and even suburban backyards. They will winter along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts from Virginia to Panama. □



# Virginia Wildlife Magazine

## The Perfect Gift for the Holidays

This holiday season save almost \$50 by giving  
*Virginia Wildlife* to 10 of your friends!



**A**s a special holiday promotion, you can give a full year of *Virginia Wildlife* to 10 or more friends for only \$8.00 apiece! That's a 38% savings off the regular subscription price! Simply include the full name and address of each person to whom you would like to send a subscription.

**This special holiday offer expires January 31, 2004.**

But, remember, even one subscription to *Virginia Wildlife* is still a great gift idea that gives all year long, at just \$12.95 per year.

All orders must be prepaid.  
Make the check payable to "Treasurer of Virginia." Mail to *Virginia Wildlife*, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

Virginia Wildlife Magazine subscription calls only 1-800-710-9369  
Twelve issues for \$12.95!

All other calls to (804) 367-1000  
Visit our Web site at [www.dgif.state.va.us](http://www.dgif.state.va.us)